THE ANGUISH OF THE JEWS

Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism

Revised and Updated

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INTRODUCTION

The republication of this twenty year old history of antisemitism undertaken on the initiative of a Christian publishing house is, paradoxically, a measure of both progress and failure in Jewish-Christian understanding and dialogue of the last score of years. A Christian publishing initiative taken on so self-incriminating a subject is obviously significant and encouraging. No less significant but less encouraging on the other hand is the need to republish it at all. The first objective of the original publication of the book was to acquaint Christians generally with the immense sufferings of Jews throughout the Christian era. The objective has not been realized.[1] The problematic that supplied the motivation for the first publication still obtains. The vast majority of Christians, even well educated, are all but totally ignorant of what happened to Jews in history and of the culpable involvement of the Church. They are ignorant of this because, excepting a few recent inclusions, the antisemitic record does not appear in Christian history books or social studies, and because Christians are not inclined to read histories of antisemitism. Jews on the other hand are by and large acutely aware of this page of history if for no other reason than that it is so extensively and intimately intermingled with the history of the Jews and Judaism. It is little exaggeration to state that those pages of history Jews have committed to memory are the very ones that have been torn from Christian (and secular) history books. This new edition of the original volume is a

repeated effort to contribute toward the reinsertion of those pages.

Such a project holds more than academic interest. Indeed the fate of the fledgling Jewish-Christian dialogue is in a real sense at stake. The disparity of knowledge separating Christians and Jews in an area that touches them so closely renders authentic communication difficult. How in effect can the Jew, laden with the knowledge of his/her people's centuries-old oppression in Christendom, engage in fruitful dialogue with the Christian who is sincerely convinced that his/her partner in dialogue is simply too persecution-minded? Or, inversely, can the Christian dialogist, uninitiated to the dark pages of Jewish-Christian history, succeed any better with his Jewish partner who believes that Christians are fully familiar with these pages and yet callous concerning the persecution and suffering of his/her people? This imbalance of vital knowledge can only serve to impede, even vitiate the dialogue. The Holocaust, the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials, and many Church documents touching the problem of antisemitism have helped to increase interest in the subject of antisemitism and to rectify the imbalance, but far from adequately. The inclination to deny the reality of antisemitism and to regard the Holocaust as a latter-day aberration with little or no roots in the past or connection with the present is still widespread, and thus the problem is not faced.

This historical ignorance is pregnant with untoward consequences. It robs the Christian of grounds for motivation to take hatred of Jews as a serious social and ethical problem and to discover it in him/herself. It prevents the Christian from understanding Jews, their needs, hurts, and aspirations, many of which were shaped in the crucible of perennial oppression. Further, it blocks the way to Christian self-understanding, for antisemitism has left its mark on the Christian (and his/her Church) as much as on the Jew. It denies the Christian an opportunity to confront a capital sin of the Christian past, recapitulated in the present and in him/herself, and to undertake the *metanoia* this requires. Of grave consequence, finally, is the fact that this Christian refusal to face the antisemitic past is an important contributor to the extraordinary durability of this longest hatred of human history.

This volume then may serve as an invitation to Christian

readers to enter into the dark side of the Christian heritage, to undergo what might be called a historical psychoanalysis in the hope that by tracing out the origin and development of Jew-hatred this ageless evil will be banished from history and from the depths of the modern (and Christian) soul. For the Christian, such a venture would, in most instances, be an almost total uncovering of repressed material, a painful catharsis. Only such an exorcism of the demons of the past will permit a reassessment of the quality of our Christianity and the truth of our theology and lead to that attitude of maturity and responsibility so essential to the mutual understanding and cooperation with Jews to which the Church is committed.[2]

Basically, the present edition retains the purpose, method, and factual content of the first. It purports to present a substantially complete but succinct exposition of the data of the antisemitic development, proceeding age by age and region by region as the course of events dictates. It is not written for the scholar but for the educated person who in his/her studies missed these important pages of history. It is the writer's hope that it will serve as an introduction to an extensive and complex subject, to an abiding interest in the struggle against antisemitism, and to the improvement of Jewish-Christian relations.

The new edition is to a certain point a revision, not of facts but of some perspectives. In a critique of the first edition in 1965 Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg wrote:

> What came through to me in Flannery's writing is his still on-going education in a very painful subject. I heard a decent man, who has been nurtured in conventional Catholic education and attitude, who was recasting these attitudes as he was confronting, for the first time, the underside of the history of the Church. This knowledge was clearly remaking him, but the process was not yet complete . . . [3]

Excluding the personal compliment, I can make Rabbi Hertzberg's words my own, but would change the "was" of his last sentence to the present tense. Rabbi Hertzberg is right. Education in the history of antisemitism is on-going, painful, and a remaking process. It is, moreover, probably never complete. The prototype

and paragon of all prejudices, antisemitism is a rich source of insight into history, human nature, and into one's self. For the Christian in particular it is a valuable instrument for sounding the depths of the Christian psyche and character. The twenty years that separate this edition from the first exemplify some effects of this process. A comparative reading would show several divergences from the original. Pre-Christian antisemitism is conceded less weight in the development of antisemitism. The role of the churches is of necessity granted more. Rationalist antisemitism is also given greater importance. A tighter historical bond is found joining Christian and modern racist and Nazi antisemitism—and therefore the Holocaust—but at the same time they are sharply distinguished as opposites in their essential nature. The demonic character of antisemitism is sensed more clearly, and its spiritual and pathological depths are emphasized. Whoever will continue the journey into this cavernous hatred will find that he/she is at grips with an unfathomable evil. Those who will not do so risk remaining or becoming its prey.

The reader must be warned of the unavoidable refraction that is produced by a history of this kind that focuses relentlessly upon the negative content of the record of Jewish-Christian relations. The refraction is further magnified by the summary manner in which the seemingly endless series of negative occurrences is presented, giving off thereby an unintended suggestion that these data tell the whole story. As an antidote to this distorting effect the reading of a comprehensive history of Jews and Judaism is recommended.

Something must be said about definitions. The term "antisemitism", a misnomer, is also a problem.[4] First used in 1879 to signify racial antipathy toward Jews, it has since come to include anti-Jewish hatred of all types and of all eras. Misnomer though it is, common usage permits it to be used in the wider sense. Care however must be taken not to confuse it with anti-Jewish manifestations that are not strictly speaking antisemitic. The distinguishing mark of all antisemitism in the strict sense is hatred or contempt and a stereotyping of the Jewish people as such. In the absence of either of these qualifiers antisemitism does not exist. It should be distinguished therefore from indiscriminate hostility to which all peoples and groups have been prey; from anti-Ju-

daism, a theological construct, with which it is often intermingled; and from anti-Jewish manifestations that may lead to—or in history have led to—antisemitism but do not possess the attributes specified above.[5] Unfortunately, even seasoned scholars have failed to respect distinctions such as these and have thus created a semantical confusion that has often rendered rational discourse on the subject well nigh impossible. In this volume we shall restrict ourselves to applications of the term in the strict sense without, for all that, discounting the fact that other manifestations, such as anti-Judaism, anti-Zionism, indifference and silence in the face of Jewish peril, etc., are usually richly laden with antisemitism or used as fronts or disguises behind which it does its damage. This strict usage, further, does not negate the fact that there are attitudes and policies which though not antisemitic in themselves are dangerous to the Jewish people and their vital interests. Some authors have effectively warned against such attitudes and policies and have entitled them the "real", the "new", and even the "ultimate" antisemitism.[6] Their emphasis on these new Jewish perils is well taken, but their use of the word antisemitism dilutes that rigor of terminology which alone will bring clarity to its meaning and dispel the present confusion. Beyond this, an overextension of the term plays into the hands of the antisemite who would divest it—and the reality it denotes—of all specific content.

It is a pleasure to express thanks to those without whose assistance or encouragement this book would have already found its last resting place on library shelves. First thanks should go to Fr. Kevin Lynch and Mr. Donald Brophy of Paulist Press for their invitation to update the book for republication. Thanks is due to Bishop Louis E. Gelineau of Providence, Rhode Island, who encouraged this effort and allowed a work schedule without which it would not have been possible; to Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher, founder of the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies and Distinguished Professor of Seton Hall University without whose assistance the first edition would never have been attempted; to Dr. Eugene Fisher, Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for supplying relevant materials; to Dr. Robert Michael

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Thanks, above all, to God, our common Father, who continues to reconcile his chosen peoples that have been so long estranged.

1
THE ANCIENT WORLD

Antisemitism is not, despite a common opinion, as old as the Jews.[1] While occupying a homeland of their own, Jews encountered the normal hostility of rival powers but nothing that could strictly be called antisemitism. This development was reserved for the Diaspora, the dispersion, and it was not until the third century B.C.E.[2] that its presence there could be clearly discerned.

Israel's Exodus from Egypt in the thirteenth pre-Christian century has been called the "first pogrom," and some historians concede it an antisemitic character.[3] And antisemitic it was if, and only if, one unduly stretches the meaning of the word. Egypt at that period had already developed a strong xenophobia, particularly with respect to the numerous Semitic tribes to the East that continued to covet her luxuriant Nile valley. The hated Hyksos had departed, leaving in their wake memories that the presence of any Semite on Egyptian soil would not fail to revive. "Look how numerous and powerful the Israelite people are growing, more so than we ourselves! Come, let us deal shrewdly with them to stop their increase; otherwise in time of war they too may join our enemies" (Exod. 1:9-10). These words of the Pharaoh actually betray a nervous national leader rather than an enemy of Jewry.

The near-millennium which extended from the Exodus to the age of Esdras and Nehemiah (fifth century B.C.E.) were years

of painful spiritual and cultural formation. The people Moses led to Canaan were forged at length into a religious and social solidarity that subsequent millennia would not succeed in destroying. From the heights of Sinai, the voice of Yahweh had thundered forth the tenet of unity: "I, the Lord, am your God . . . you shall not have other gods besides me" (Exod. 20:2-3); and Israel's election was made no less plain: "I, the Lord, am sacred, I, who have set you apart from the other nations to be my own" (Lev. 20:26). From these transcending declarations a plethora of rituals, precepts, and customs were drawn that hedged Israel about and set her off as God's anointed among the nations. The Jews could have no doubt: their segregation was the will of Yahweh.

As they passed through the turbulent periods of judges, kings, and prophets, the world at large paid them little attention.[4] As late as the fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus—that meticulous observer and perambulating pioneer of history who visited many lands, including "the Palestine of Syria"—ignored the Jews in his comprehensive history of the time.[5] Obviously, their theological claims and their ethnic exclusivism neither interested nor irked the syncretic polytheists of antiquity as long as they were worked out on Palestinian soil. Nor did they attract much notice during the first years of the Diaspora. At most, these introverted communities scattered among the nations were regarded as mere curiosities. Herodotus also visited Elphantine, yet he failed to note in his *History* that the garrison there was Jewish. But the Diaspora, quietly gaining its foothold in the ancient world, was the stage being prepared for the inevitable clash between the worshippers of Yahweh and those of pagan deities.

EARLY CONTACTS

Dispersion of Jews began as early as the ninth century B.C.E., and, fed by a series of deportations and emigrations from Palestine, grew until, well before the Common era began, Babylonia, Egypt, and finally Rome became important Jewish centers. From these the Diaspora fanned out to encircle the entire Mediterranean, reaching as far as Persia, Armenia, Arabia, and Abyssinia in the East and Spain and Great Britain in the West.[6]

Though there is considerable disagreement about its size, the most reliable estimates place it at some four million persons during the first Christian century with another million in Palestine, the total comprising about one-eighth of the Roman Empire.[7]

Contrary to a widespread opinion, the Jews of the Diaspora did not occupy a special position in the economic structure of the ancient world. Their distribution among the various areas of the economy reflected fairly closely the general pattern. Coming from an agricultural nation, often as slaves and colonizers, a very large number—probably a majority—were farmers. A few, especially those who had emigrated voluntarily and had come to the cities, were engaged in commerce. They peopled all the crafts and industries of ancient times and eventually gained the monopoly of a few, for example, glasswork, weaving, and dyeing. As their separateness lessened in Hellenic-Roman times, they entered the sciences and other professions, and also had a part in public functions, particularly tax-farming and soldiery.

Early contacts of the Jews with antiquity were generally harmonious. The reluctance of many of the exiled to return to Palestine after emancipation and the ever-growing attraction Egypt and other Hellenized centers held for Palestinian Jews give adequate testimony of this. Moreover, the earliest literary references to Jews in the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., though they show no real knowledge of Judaism, were not unfavorable. Theophrastus entertained strange notions of Jewish rites and called Jews a "race of philosophers."[8] Clearchus of Soli, a disciple of Aristotle, considered them "descendants of the philosophers of India," an opinion he attributed to his teacher.[9] Megasthenus and Hermippus likewise considered them a species of foreign philosopher, the latter claiming for some of Pythagoras' tenets a Jewish origin.[10]

The razing of the Temple in the Elephantine colony (c. 410 B.C.E.) can hardly be considered an antisemitic act. Rather was it an act inspired by political motives and religious fanaticism. The Jewish garrison stationed there had been sent by Persian interests. Naturally, the Egyptian inhabitants resented Persian domination and harbored ill will for the representatives of their enemies. To make matters worse, the Jewish practice of sacrific-

ing animals on the altars of Yahweh infuriated Egyptian priests who, as worshippers of the sacred ram, considered the Jewish rites sacrilegious.

Traditionally, the history of antisemitism is said to begin with the story of Haman, reported in the book of Esther. We are told that Haman, grand vizier of King Ahasuerus of Persia (Xerxes I, 486-465 B.C.E.) was angered by the Jew Mordecai's refusal to "bend his knee to him," and warned the king in these words: "There is a people scattered through all the provinces of thy Kingdom, and separated from one another, that use new laws and ceremonies, and moreover despise the King's ordinances" (Esther 3:8). Most exegetes, however, reject the historicity of this passage, because it reflects the Maccabean era of the second century B.C.E. rather than the Persian epoch of the fifth century. Nevertheless, the text is important since it succinctly formulates the classical reaction to the Jewish refusal to commingle and to worship national gods that was to echo throughout subsequent centuries.

THE HELLENIC WORLD

After the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.E.), the Jews ceased to remain unnoticed. The Macedonian conqueror, pupil of Aristotle and diligent propagator of the Grecian mode of life, left behind him a world rapidly becoming Hellenized. Against this first unification of culture, Jewish communities—now grown in size and influence—emerged in all their singularity. Unlike the rest of their Greco-Oriental and, later, Roman neighbors, Jews did not take their place as average citizens of the cities and towns. They continued to acknowledge Jerusalem as the Holy City to which they sent a *didrachma* each year as a personal tax and where stood the Temple of Yahweh, their one true God, invisible and transcendent, who refused to assume His place in the pantheons of the empire. Looking upon their host countries as profane soil and their fellow citizens as children of error and superstition, Jews grouped themselves in a quarter of their own city. The "ghetto" was a voluntary reality hundreds of years before the term was coined or legislation regarding it enacted. To the proud heirs of Pericles, Aristotle and

Homer, this aloofness was an insufferable arrogance. Convinced that all that was not Greek was barbarian, they resented rival claims to superiority or privilege on the part of a people they considered politically and culturally undistinguished. A collision between these two proud and dissimilar mentalities could only be a matter of time.

The first clear traces of a specifically anti-Jewish sentiment appeared in third century Egypt. The place is not accidental. Egypt was not only the heart of the Diaspora but the most advanced point of Hellenization outside Greece itself; Alexandria was a second Athens. Unsettled conditions in Palestine after Alexander's death brought increased deportations and immigrations of Jews to Egypt, that cradle of the Jewish nation which had never ceased to sing its siren song to Israel. The chief recipient of the inflow was Alexandria, the new "emporium of the western world" (Strabo), founded by Alexander, and fast becoming the commercial and intellectual capital of the world. Jews had been invited to populate the city by Alexander, who had given a section to them in order that they might be able to live according to their Law. By the beginning of the Common era, Jews occupied two-fifths of the city and already numbered 100,000. They were permitted a senate and ethnarch (governor) of their own, were active in commerce and possibly had a monopoly in grain and navigation of the Nile; they were conspicuous in tax-farming, and a few had grown very wealthy—an achievement that did not endear them to the envious Greeks, Syrians, and Egyptians who sought the same success. All Alexandrian Jews were not noble characters, but in this they were only typical Alexandrians, who, if we can believe Emperor Hadrian, were not of the highest caliber: "Their one God is money; Christians adore it, Jews adore it, so does everybody else."[11] The old xenophobia, moreover, was still alive, so, discontent under Greek and Roman rule, Egyptians took offense at the tolerance shown Jews. But most of all, Jewish refusal to accept common religious and social standards was resented by the strongly Hellenized population. Alexandria was manifestly predestined to become the chief center of antisemitism in the ancient world.

The first attack came from the pens of Alexandrian writers.[12] Hecataeus of Abdera, a Greek historian of the early third century